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ABSTRACT

This executive summary describes a resource about innovative teaching that profiles and analyzes the work of eight educators working in secondary school communities in Australia. Each case study in the resource is intended as a stand-alone snapshot of good practice in which voices of students, colleagues, principals, and community members illuminate teachers' work from their perspectives. Those profiled are considered by the authors to be ordinary teachers doing extraordinary things, managing to sustain their level of innovativeness, and making innovative teaching look easy. According to the executive summary, the research reveals that the innovative educators exhibit a diverse range of strengths that reflect an enhanced level of teacher professionalism. The executive summary describes a concluding chapter in the resource that lists these strengths of the teachers: personal attributes (altruism, creativity, and passion); skills (applied learning, standard setting, and change management); knowledge (innovation, pedagogy, and professional development); values (total commitment to those they teach; willingness to share their knowledge, skills, and strategies with others; and an insatiable desire to improve their own practice and "reinvent" themselves in response to new demands, challenges, and opportunities) and strategies (creation of alliances, marshaling of resources, and identification of advocates). The executive summary lists work such as the following undertaken by the innovative educators: (1) initiating student-run businesses that provide community services and on-the-job training for students; (2) supporting students as they partner with local organizations to provide community development; (3) engaging retired community members as mentors for year 10 students to research career options; and (4) using computer-assisted language to help students design and operate a Japanese "virtual village." (Contains 19 references.) (YLB)

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ED 456 268

Reforming schools through innovative teaching

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Australian College of Education, Enterprise and Career Education Foundation and Dusseldorp Skills Forum

Executive summary

This is a resource about innovative teaching. It profiles, analyses and celebrates the work of eight accomplished educators in Australia. Drawing on contemporary theories of innovation, teacher professionalism and school reform, this work provides a stimulus for some in-depth thinking about teaching in today's 'knowledge society'. For example, in the first decade of the twenty-first century, what should teaching look, sound and feel like? How should it be enacted? Who should be responsible for its quality?

This is unashamedly a 'good news' story in that it demonstrates the significant impact being generated by select innovative teachers in schools, as well as the wider communities in which they operate. The research on which this resource is based reveals that their work is having a positive influence on business people, community workers and retirees as much as it does on students, parents and colleagues.

However, this resource is not limited to the promulgation of good practice examples. More importantly, it is designed to actively engage key stakeholders in informed debate and collective action with a view to increasing the level of innovative teaching at all levels and in all sectors of education.

Given that innovative teachers *do* make a difference, a critical question emerging from this research is 'How can we generate a critical mass of these teachers, so that innovation becomes a defining feature of the educational landscape?'

Other research suggests that a number of challenges confront the education profession at present. It has been argued for some time that teachers' work needs to be reconceptualised; that the work of accomplished teachers needs to be recognised and certified; and that teacher education and professional development need to be reshaped.

In addition, there is evidence of increasing recognition in business and government circles that developing and sustaining innovation is critical to this country's future. It is argued that the advent of knowledge-based economies demands that we not only understand innovation, but that we also increase our capacity to develop and manage it.

This resource contains case studies of innovative educators working in secondary school communities. Each study constitutes a stand-alone snapshot of good practice in which the voices of students, colleagues, principals and community members illuminate teachers' work from different perspectives.

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To some, this work may appear relatively unremarkable at first glance. For example, a practising teacher might well respond, 'Oh, I've used that technique'; 'My team has implemented that strategy'; or 'Our school introduced a program like that years ago'. To be sure, many of the ideas and the strategies recorded here are not necessarily new, groundbreaking or revolutionary, nor should they be viewed as potential panaceas or 'quick fixes' for student alienation or other deep-rooted issues in schools.

However, there are three points worthy of note regarding these case studies. First, those who have been profiled can be described as *ordinary teachers doing extraordinary things* in creative ways. While most are school-based with normal teaching loads, they are acknowledged as achieving higher-order outcomes for multiple audiences. Second, they have managed to *sustain their level of innovativeness* over an extended period. For some, this has been a case of 'swimming against the tide' - either at some personal cost or with limited support. Third, they *make innovative teaching look easy*. Those who have observed these educators at close range readily admit that while their work appears effortless, it actually represents quite a sophisticated technology that has taken some time and a good deal of hard work to refine to its current standard.

Individually and collectively, these case studies highlight the fact that quality teaching is a highly complex, demanding and interactive process. While there is a common perception in the community that 'anyone can teach', the reality is that not everyone can teach well. So what can we learn from those who have been identified by other professionals as being highly innovative teachers who are making such a difference in their schools and communities?

The key findings from this research reveal that the eight innovative educators exhibit a diverse range of strengths that reflect an enhanced level of teacher professionalism. In the concluding chapter, these strengths are listed in dot-point form under a set of headings that include attributes, skills, knowledge, values and strategies. One of the risks in categorising teachers' work in this way is that it can detract from the integrated and holistic manner in which quality teaching is enacted. It is possible that detailed lists can lead to protracted arguments over semantics. For example, 'Is a particular strength - say, 'lateral thinking' - an attribute, a skill or a strategy?' However, demonstration would appear to be more important than its classification. There is also potential for more heat than light to be generated by prolonged debate over the virtues of generic, subject-specific or developmental-level standards. They all have a place.

One of the main reasons for pursuing this categorisation of innovative teaching is to generate greater specificity, with a view to making good practice more *transparent*. The objective is to identify what is different about innovative educators, along with the means by which they ply their craft. Hence, the intended outcome is an increased capacity to distinguish between a teacher who is highly innovative and one who may be less so. At a practical level, listing the major strengths exhibited by innovative teachers provides a set of indicators by which quality or performance might be measured. For example, those wishing to demonstrate their expertise in innovative teaching could be invited to collect and present evidence in relation to such criteria.

The innovative educators profiled in this study exhibit a number of personal *attributes* including altruism, creativity and passion. A number of phrases captured

during the research describe them as 'self-starters', 'ideas people' and 'highly-attuned'. Those who know these teachers well tend to explain how they are 'different' by focusing mainly on their personal qualities, raising the issue of whether exceptional teachers are born rather than made.

A second key finding is that these teachers demonstrate advanced *skills* in a number of areas including applied learning, standard setting and change management. A common feature is their capacity for enabling students to make 'connections' between key learning areas as well as to link aspects of their home, school and working lives. Colleagues and principals commented frequently on their vast repertoire of teaching strategies and their ability to draw from a big 'bag of tricks' in order to engage any student at a particular stage in his/her intellectual or social development. More significantly, however, is the extent to which these teachers are able to facilitate innovation and change, especially through the focusing of disparate energies and the development of teamwork for whole-school and other projects.

Third, innovative educators possess in-depth *knowledge* on a range of topics including innovation, pedagogy and professional development. While students and others frequently identify expertise in a key learning area as a strength of these teachers, this tends to be surpassed by their knowledge and understanding of those who are in their care. More than just simply establishing and maintaining good relationships, this involves comprehending theories of adolescence and the nuances of contemporary youth culture. Keeping up-to-date with current trends and developments within and beyond the education sector is also characteristic of these teachers.

Fourth, these teachers display core *values* that are synonymous with being a true professional. These include a total commitment to those they teach; a willingness to share their knowledge, skills and strategies with others; and an insatiable desire to improve their own practice and 'reinvent' themselves in response to new demands, challenges and opportunities. Innovative teachers are regarded as role models and mentors for others, within and beyond the schools in which they work. They follow a personal code of ethics and are invariably driven by what they consider to be in the best interests of their students. They also view themselves, and are seen by others, as actively contributing to school, civic and professional communities.

Fifth, these innovative educators employ a range of multi-faceted *strategies* including the creation of alliances, the marshalling of resources and the identification of advocates. Phrases captured during the research include 'pushing the boundaries', 'creating spaces' and 'value-adding'. What is interesting about the list of strategies that has been compiled is the extent to which it reflects a practical integration of the skills, knowledge and values identified above. For example, the 'building of communities' is a common strategy used by these educators to make the school more pro-active in the social and economic development of the town, municipality or shire of which it is part.

The resource concludes with a number of implications that are set in a context of 'Where to from here?'. It is suggested that further action is required to identify, recognise and sustain innovative teachers. There are calls for follow-up programs, training and ongoing research. The objective is to focus the attention of key stakeholders from business, community organisations, education systems and

teacher training institutions with a view to working collectively to increase the level of innovative teaching nation-wide. If, as has been argued in a report to the Commonwealth government entitled *Innovation: unlocking the future* (2000), education has a pivotal role to play in developing an 'innovative culture' in this country, then there is no time to lose.

Innovative teaching

The work of eight innovative educators is listed below. Each case study represents an example of innovative teaching in a secondary school community. While the Project Reference Group endeavoured to generate diversity among those selected (eg with regard to length and type of teaching experience, location, system, gender etc) the studies should be seen as illustrative rather than representative. The examples of good practice are as follows:

Matching goals in enterprising ways - Jenifer Murdock (Hawker College, Australian Capital Territory)

- Initiating student-run businesses that provide services for the community and on-the-job training for student participants.

Community-based learning - Nigel Howard (Norwood-Morialta High School, South Australia)

- Supporting students to work in partnership with local organisations to promote community development.

Plan-it youth mentoring project - Sandra Wilson (Berkeley Vale Community High School, NSW)

- Engaging retired community members as mentors for year 10 students to research career options.

Computer-assisted language learning - Melissa Hughes (Shelford Anglican Girls School, Victoria)

- Using computer-assisted language learning to enable students to design and operate a Japanese 'virtual village'.

Improved practice through professional learning - John Eaton and Gemma Lawlor (Bridgetown High School, Western Australia)

- Applying educational theories in local contexts in ways that improve not only student outcomes but also those of their teaching colleagues.

Teaching through demonstration and fun - Mandy West (Queechy High School, Tasmania)

- Using performing arts as a means of engaging students in hands-on exercises that expand horizons and develop life skills.

Associated learning through emotional responses - Randall Clinch (Consultant)

- Employing a range of interactive techniques designed to enable students to choose their own thoughts, stimulate their emotions and determine their actions.

While seven of these educators are trained teachers, one is a consultant who offers services to schools on the basis of his experience in the youth sector. The Project Reference Group was keen to include in the case studies at least one example of a person from outside formal education using innovative strategies and techniques. This raises several issues including recognition of prior learning, training, certification and remuneration of innovative educators. It would appear that a major challenge for education authorities is to identify ways of ensuring that those from beyond the profession with demonstrated expertise in innovative teaching have opportunities to gain appropriate recognition or certification.

The educators profiled in these case studies are 'ordinary' teachers doing 'extraordinary' things in creative ways. They have come to the attention of the Project Reference Group via a range of means including nomination, referral and networking on the part of professional educators. It is readily acknowledged that there are highly innovative teachers in many other levels, sectors and settings in education. The hope of all those involved with this project is that this resource will stimulate the documentation and dissemination of further examples of good practice via websites and hard copy, along with more dynamic forms of professional development, mentoring and educational leadership in a variety of settings.

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